MODERN FAMILIES INDEX 2016

DENISE PRIEST, DIRECTOR OF EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS, BRIGHT HORIZONS

Bright Horizons is proud to partner with Working Families by sponsoring the *Modern Families Index* – this is the third year that we have done so. Research like is this important, it gives voice to working parents and carers and insight into their challenges and aspirations.

Helping working families and employers find the right kind of support is paramount. This year's report tells us that more parents are working full-time and the "typical" family arrangement, where a father works full-time and a mother works part-time, is receding. It is clear that balancing work and family life is an ongoing challenge for more and more families in the UK.

For example, the survey shows that much of working parents' annual leave is being used to cover childcare emergencies, at the detriment of time for family bonding and wellbeing. On a typical working day many parents struggle to go home on time – and if they do they are likely to take work home with them and keep available on email and mobile. Working parents are trying to "do it all," and are often reluctant – or fearful to ask for help.

What strikes me most strongly about all of this is that what we see in the workplace is likely to be the tip of the iceberg in terms of how mothers and fathers are feeling. We can't assume that if they aren't asking they aren't needing. At Bright Horizons we are proud to partner with many forward-thinking employers who have gone the extra mile to support their employees with their work-life responsibilities and their wellbeing. And the good news is that this works – both for the employees and for those who employ them.

I'd like to thank Working Families for coordinating the *Modern Families Index*, and I'd also like to thank the thousands of mothers, fathers and carers who shared their views and experiences, giving us all a window into their world so we can help change it for the better.

Denise Priest

Director of Employer Partnerships

Bright Horizons

SARAH JACKSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WORKING FAMILIES

The *Modern Families Index* is in its third year. During this time families have lived in the shadow of austerity, combining family life and work in different ways. Whilst the *Index* cannot capture all of the different ways family and work-life fit, it does offer insight into some of the universal pressure points: how much time do families really have? Are they able to adapt work to fit with the family life they want, and to fit with the care they need? Is the support in place to assist them? Is it getting harder or easier? And are the ways that parents provide care and work changing at all? The 2016 *Index* indicates that in some areas things are getting better, but also highlights areas of real concern.

I have already mentioned the shadow of austerity, and that families have felt the effects of the economic downturn. Incomes have remained fairly stable, job insecurity has risen and work has, for many, intensified. For families in the UK, each parent working full-time is becoming the norm – families may not be able to get by without two full-time incomes. This comes at a cost, and that cost is all too often family time, which is eroded at the edges as work takes over. Parents identify family as their highest priority; where work conflicts with this, tensions arise. It is important, therefore, that parents are supported to reconcile family and work as best they can.

Those parents with long working weeks appear to have the least control over their working time, with long contracted hours being topped up with a significant number of extra hours. Employers must ensure they are realistic about what can be achieved in the hours allocated to the role, and support a culture where employees are not hesitant about discussing workloads.

The idea of 'compatible flexibility' - where flexible working is aligned with choice - is a compelling one. It is not 'done to' employees, but is a positive choice offering some discretion and control over work. It is clear from our findings that this needs to be available to all employees, not just well paid or very valuable ones. One way to do this would be to move towards workplace cultures that are flexible by default. Thinking about the importance of job design, flexible recruitment and hiring, and building the quality and sustainability of these flexibly designed jobs, is a central recommendation of our report.

There are signs that things are changing in families. Amongst younger parents, more equal sharing of work and care is happening in some households, although traditional gender roles around work and care remain powerful. Young fathers, in particular, have an appetite to be more involved with family life. Our findings show that, as things stand, these 'millennials' have high expectations of being able to achieve a good work-life balance – it remains to be seen whether they will really be any different to previous generations once they have experienced workplace culture.

Anyone looking for an insight into how 'everyday' modern families combine work and family life in the UK will be interested in the *Index*. We are pleased, in 2016, to launch the findings at the same time as 4Children publish their broader research into family life in Britain. Taken together, they offer a unique and comprehensive view of the experience of UK families in 2016.

Working Families is grateful to Bright Horizons for their continued commitment to the *Modern Families Index*; their support makes sure that the voice of these families continues to be heard.

Sarah Jackson OBE

Chief Executive

Working Families.

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KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY:

- More parents are working full-time. For these parents, the traditional dominant arrangement of a
 father working full-time and a mother working part-time is receding. In 49 per cent of couple
 households both parents are working full-time.
- Seniority allows for flexible working. There is evidence that people on higher incomes are more likely
 to work flexibly: nearly 80 per cent of those earning between £50,000 and £70,000 reported they are
 able to access flexible working. Only 50 per cent of those earning less than £30,000 did.
- Parents continue to put in extra hours just to get the job done. In some cases an additional ten hours a week this is almost 74 days a year for someone contracted to work seven hours per day.
- Working parents are increasingly feeling "burnout". This is due to the toll of family and work obligations. A third of parents (29 per cent) reported being burned out often or all the time and

- many take annual or sick leave to cope. Family life is a priority for most parents, but work consistently impinges. This prevents parents from helping children with homework or putting them to bed. Forty per cent said this happened regularly.
- Millennial parents (aged 16-35) are the more likely to both work full-time, work flexibly and share caring responsibilities. However, millennials are struggling to maintain these commitments and it is millennial parents who are particularly prone to burnout. In addition:
 - Millennials are the most likely to say they would like to downshift and the most willing to take a pay cut to find a better balance. The idea of career progression characterised by long hours and sacrifice of family life is less prominent in their mind-set.
 - o From an employer perspective this poses questions about engagement, loyalty and performance: how will work have to be configured to meet the expectations of millennials? For policy makers there are also questions: how can compatible flexibility be supported, and how can barriers to equal share of care be addressed and removed? How, effectively, can policy be designed to work with the grain of the work-life fit aspirations and needs of young families?
- There is a muted response to the government's proposed increase in free childcare. Parents aren't planning substantial changes in response to the planned increase in government support for childcare. Only 14 per cent said it would have a significant impact on their plans.
- For women, recruitment and childcare go hand-in-hand. Women remain more likely than men to consider childcare responsibilities before taking a new job: over 60 per cent of women strongly agree that they would need to do this compared to 36 per cent of men.
- Fathers are doing more. More than one in five fathers now say they share care, with younger parents the most likely to report working flexibly and sharing family responsibilities. But gendered work expectations still persist: mothers remain the first port of call when childcare breaks down by a factor of two to one.
- A mother's work is never done. Although all parents prioritise spending time with children when getting home from work, traditional gender roles still persist in the home. For example, mothers (nearly 45 per cent) are more likely than fathers (just under 25 per cent) to start doing domestic chores straight away.

ABOUT THE MODERN FAMILIES INDEX

The *Modern Families Index* is intended to provide a snapshot of family life in the UK today. In particular, it focuses on how families combine work and family life, and how successfully parents feel they are combining family and work in the way that they want to. The *Index* is not intended to be an exhaustive, descriptive account of every aspect of family life and work - rather it examines the points where the two come together; time spent together (and the quality of that time), aspirations for family life, the way that work accommodates family responsibility and access to family and work integration are some of the factors examined. The *Index* asks some questions about income and financial wellbeing, but for a more detailed description of family income other researchers have covered this ground in much more detail. In particular, the *Index* looks at parents of different ages, and one of the key questions each year is to examine whether there are differences between parents of different ages in both how they arrange work and family life, and whether their aspirations for integration and their opportunities to make this a reality differ.

FAMILIES IN THE UK TODAY

There are 4.7 million married (opposite and same sex) or civil partner couple families with dependent children in the UK. There are 1.2 million cohabiting couples with dependent children and 1.9 million lone parent families with dependent children. In 2015, women accounted for 90 per cent of lone parents with dependent children and men the remaining 10 per cent. Married couples had a higher average number of dependent children in their family than other family types, at 1.8 children per family compared with 1.7 on average and 1.6 for single parent households. Ninety-five per cent of couple families with one or two dependent children had one or both parents working, compared with 87 per cent of couple families with three or more dependent children. Similarly, 62 per cent of lone parents with one or two dependent children were working compared with 38 per cent of lone parents with three or more dependent children. Sixty-two per cent of lone parents with one or two children were working in 2012, whereas 95 per cent of couple families with one or two dependent children had at least one parent working²; clearly living with a partner makes it easier to share work and childcare.

Mothers who live with their partner and children are more likely to be in full-time work than they were a decade ago, and households with a father working full-time and a mother working part-time has decreased in proportion from 37 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2011. Fathers tend to work longer hours, and, although the overall rate of long hours worked by fathers has declined in recent years³ UK fathers still work some of the longest hours in Europe⁴. Maternal breadwinners (where women are the main earner) are increasing in number. One in three mothers in working families (33 per cent) earn at least half of household earnings. Just over half of maternal breadwinners are in couple households (56 per cent); 44 per cent are lone parents.⁵ The

¹ ONS, Families and Households, 2015

² ONS, Family size in 2012, 2013

³ Ibid

⁴ Green, F, Is Britain such a bad place to work? The level and dispersion of job quality in comparative European perspective, IoE, 2013

⁵ Cory, G and Stirling, A: Who's breadwinning in Europe? A comparative analysis of maternal breadwinning in Great Britain and Germany, IPPR, 2015

gap is narrowing between families where both parents work full-time (29 per cent) and one works full-time (usually the father) and the other part-time (31 per cent).⁶

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2015 lone parents needed to earn at least £26,725 a year before tax to achieve the minimum income standard (how much income households need to afford an acceptable standard of living). Couples with two children need to earn at least £20,000 each before tax. A family with two children earns on average £31,000 after tax, only just recovering to where it was before the 2007/8 financial crash. Family incomes remain under pressure and families continue to experience the effects of the recession and austerity and subsequent low levels of wage growth. Middle and lower income households, despite being in employment, have less discretionary disposable income and family budgets are tight.

The use of childcare in the UK is widespread. Estimates place the use of childcare as high as 68 per cent, with around half of families using more than one type of childcare.¹⁰

Grandparents are an essential part of childcare provision in the UK. Nearly three in five grandparents provide regular childcare. ¹¹ Grandparents Plus estimate that grandparents are providing an increasing amount of childcare, but grandparents are under pressure themselves, working longer and struggling to combine paid work with new caring responsibilities.

Costs to families, particularly around childcare, are high. It is estimated to cost £150,000 to bring up a child. ¹² The cost for all types of childcare for under-fives has risen by at least 27 per cent in the last Parliament and the cost of a part-time nursery place now stands at an average of £115 per week. ¹³ Parents in the UK spend 33 per cent of their net household income on childcare compared to an OECD average of 13 per cent. ¹⁴ Childcare costs are a barrier to work for women, particularly low paid women ¹⁵, and may also be a factor in parents moving out of work in order to care for their own children as costs consume too great a proportion of their earnings. A report found that of 1,000 parents, almost 20 per cent were considering either giving up work or

⁶ Connolly, Aldrich, O'Brien, Speight and Poole, Fathers and Work, 2014

⁷ Hirsch, D, A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2015, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015

⁸ Living standards: recent trends and future challenges, Institute of Fiscal Studies briefing note BN165, 2015

⁹ Lawton, K, The condition of Britain Briefing 1: Raising a Family, IPPR, 2013

¹⁰ Simon, A, Owen, C, Hollingworth, K, Provision and Use of preschool childcare in Britain, Institute of Education, 2015

¹¹ Nearly seven million grandparents provide regular childcare: <a href="www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-"www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-"www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-"www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-"www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-"issues/employment-rights/working-time-holidays/work-life-balance/nearly-seven-million, retrieved January 2014

¹² Hirsch, D, The cost of raising a child in 2015, Child Poverty Action Group, 2015

¹³ 14th annual childcare costs survey, Family and Childcare Trust, 2015

¹⁴ Women, Men and Part-time Work, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013

¹⁵ Careers and Carers: childcare and maternal labour supply, Resolution Foundation and Mumsnet, 2014

reducing their hours because of childcare costs. ¹⁶ Childcare, in some shape or form, is an essential element for most working families in enabling the combination of work and family life.

FINDINGS

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY

The sample was of 1,000 working parents from across the UK. The survey ran online between 13 November and 20 November 2015. To participate in the survey there had to be at least one working parent or carer (full-or part-time) in the household, with at least one resident dependant under 14 years old. The sample achieved an equal response between genders: 500 female and male. The sample was representative across the UK for age, gender and region. No criteria were attached to any partners of the main respondent. The age of respondents and their relationship status can be seen in figures 1 and 2.

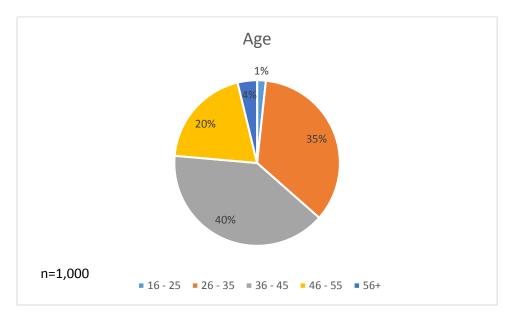


Figure 1

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¹⁶ High childcare costs mean one in five parents are considering reducing hours or giving up work altogether in 2015, 4Children website: www.4children.org.uk/News/Detail/High-childcare-costs-mean-one-in-five-parents-are-considering-reducing-hours-or-giving-up-work-altogether-in-2015, retrieved January 2015

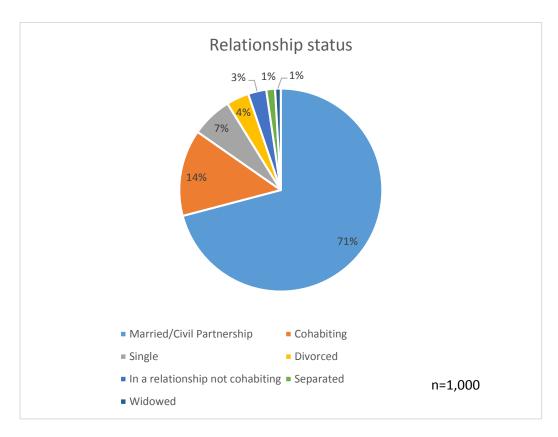


Figure 2

The majority of the sample were married or cohabiting with a partner (85 per cent). Our sample found only 15 per cent lone parents, lower than the national average of 25 per cent. Lone parents were most likely to have lower incomes, with three quarters earning less than £30,000 per annum. Seventy-two per cent of lone parents in the sample worked full-time, and lone parents were slightly more likely to work flexibly, with 60 per cent reporting some sort of flexible working arrangement. Within couple households the most common working arrangement was for both parents to be working full-time. Figure 3 shows the working arrangements of couple households.

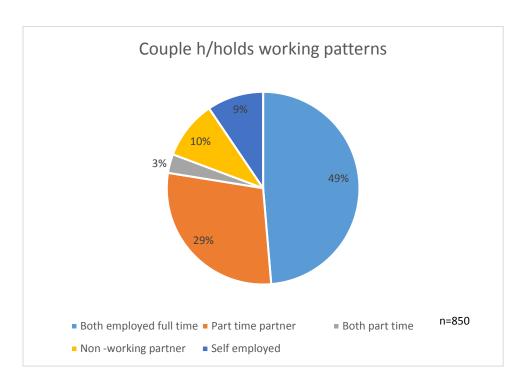


Figure 3

It is important to bear in mind that there were no criteria set beyond being a working parent for the main respondent, and no employment criteria set for their partner.

The results of this year's *Index* show that for these families each parent working full-time is becoming the norm. Of all age groups of parents, younger parents were the most likely to report both working full-time, with 78 per cent of 16-35 year olds saying that they and their partner both worked full-time, Although the 'traditional' pattern of a full-time father and part-time mother is still evident, it is no longer the most common arrangement for these parents. And although women are still more likely than men are to work reduced hours (figure 4), it appears that increasingly mothers are working more. This may be due to the growing importance of women's incomes within a household against a backdrop of austerity and low wage growth.¹⁷ Simply put, families may not be able to get by without two full-time incomes.

¹⁷ The Missing Million, Resolution Foundation, 2011

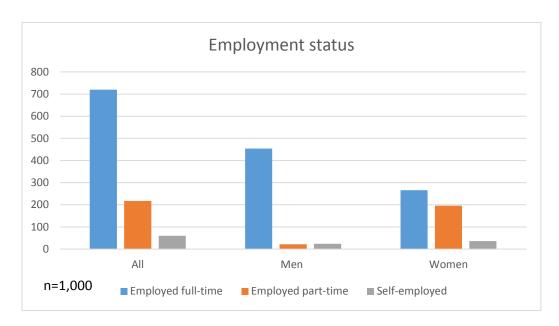


Figure 4

Parents' assessment of their income showed that just under a third (29 per cent) felt they were better off than a year ago, and younger parents were more likely to report feeling better off. Older parents, particularly those over 45, said they felt worse off. Lone parents were also more likely to report feeling worse off. In total 53 per cent said they had seen no improvement in their financial circumstances and 18 per cent said that they were worse off. Parents in London were most likely to report feeling better off, whilst those in the South West and North East were most likely to report feeling worse off. The sample in 2016 collected a wide range of responses across all income bands and did not focus on low income. Proportional regional sampling ensured that families in regions where incomes are higher were included. This allows insight into the work and life combinations of families who would not figure in low to middle income focused research.

OCCUPATION, INCOME AND ACCESS TO FLEXIBILITY

Respondents were asked about their occupation, and the major occupational groups are shown below. They were also asked whether they had access to flexible working arrangements in their job, and if they did, what arrangements they used. Parents who did not work flexibly were asked why this was (e.g. through personal choice or external factors). Figure 5 shows the most frequent five occupations selected by respondents, and why they do not work flexibly. It is interesting to note that those in occupations most likely to be done by women, and also lower down in organisational hierarchy are most likely to say their role does not accommodate flexibility: sectors where flexibility is least available are those dominated by women (administrative occupations and customer services). ¹⁸

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¹⁸ Women's pay and employment update: a public/private sector comparison, TUC, 2012

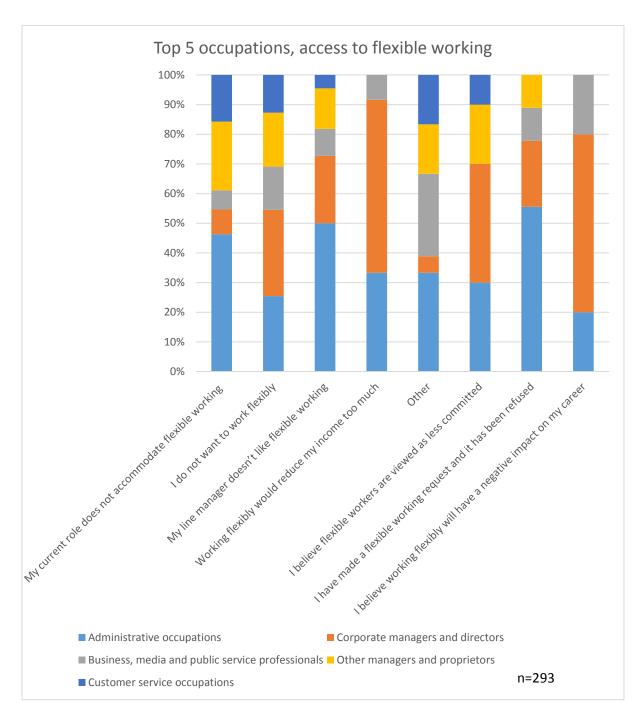


Figure 5

Income and use of flexible working are related. Parents who were better paid reported more use of flexible working (figure 6). This may be because higher paid employees enjoy more autonomy at work, and are able to determine their own working patterns with less managerial control. Other research has found that discretionary flexibility often accompanies seniority, especially around work *place*¹⁹, and that wellbeing is optimised and linked to control over working life²⁰. Parents who are in relatively low level positions may find

¹⁹ Flexible Working Provision and Uptake, CIPD, 2012

²⁰ Marmot, M et al, Social/Economic Status and Health, 1987

themselves restricted in their ability to integrate work and family life, where opportunities to access all types of flexible working are limited (such as working from home) and they lack the seniority to make change.

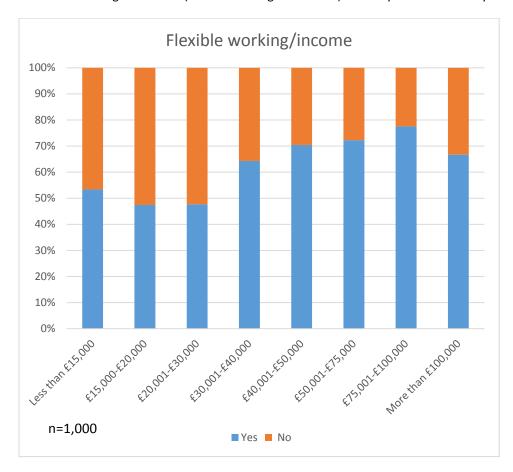


Figure 6

Other research has found that younger employees (millennials) place a premium on work-life balance and that work is one priority in their life, not *the* priority.²¹ The *Index* shows (figure 7) that it is younger workers (aged 16-35) who want to work flexibly (including reducing their hours) more than older groups of employees. Younger fathers are working more flexibly than their older counterparts: 69 per cent of fathers aged 16-35 work flexibly compared with 54 per cent of fathers aged 36-45 and 52 per cent of fathers aged 45+.

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²¹ Millennials at work: Reshaping the workplace, PWC, 2012

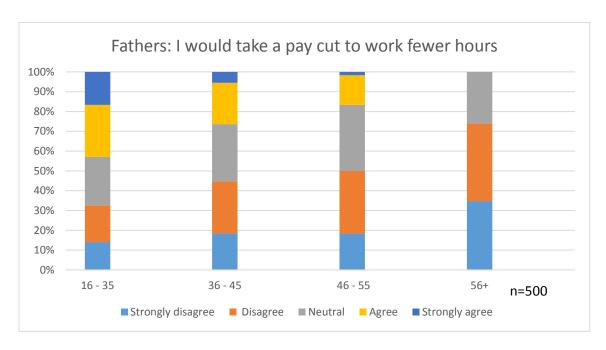


Figure 7

TIME SPENT WORKING

In terms of working time, parents reported a range of working hours. Lower hours jobs were dominated by women, with equal numbers between men and women only starting with those who are contracted to work 32-34 hours per week. For those working fewer hours, contracted hours and actual hours remained fairly closely aligned, but beyond 24 hours per week the gap between contacted hours and actual hours increases. This level may be one at which some people, mainly women, remain under in order to guarantee reliability and predictability in their working time. Typically 24 hours would equate to either a three day week or a five day week of shortened days (e.g. from 9.30am – 2.15pm) that allows for school drop off and pick up. Increasing contracted hours brings with it the risk of increased actual hours, which might jeopardise childcare and other arrangements. Those parents with long working weeks appear to have the least control over their working time, with long contracted hours being topped up with a significant number of extra hours. Figure 8 shows the numbers of parents working their contracted vs actual hours for all those working over 40 hours per week.

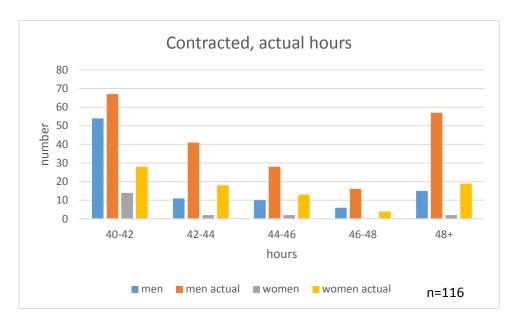


Figure 8

In general, beyond 24 hours there is a pattern of parents putting in extra hours. In some cases this can be extreme, with parents reporting they are putting in two extra hours a day, or ten each week. The reasons parents give for working extra hours are shown in figure 9.

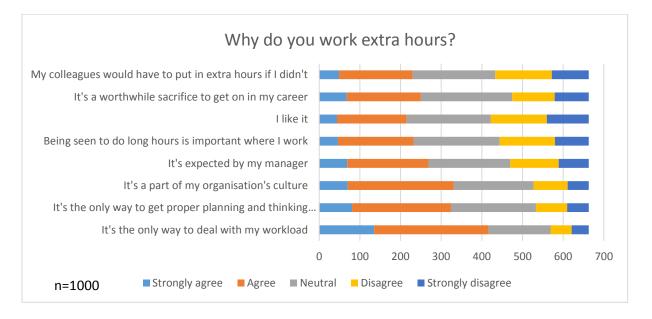


Figure 9

Work organisation and workload are the most common reasons for staying late. Accurate calibration of working time to the demands of the role is essential unless the employer is to rely on employees putting in extra time. Workplace culture is also prominent as a reason for staying late. Working late is often interpreted as commitment however inefficient this might be. These findings are consistent with last year's Modern Family *Index*: generally, the mismatch of allotted hours to tasks is the cause, which can then become culturally 'normal': a result of work intensification that has been amplified by austerity. Despite legislative and employer efforts to provide work-life balance opportunities through measures such as flexible working, the way that work is organised and prevailing workplace cultures and attitudes remain significant barriers.

This discrepancy between roles and the time people are given to fulfil them continues to be a problem, having been observed in the *Index* in preceding years and showing no signs of being resolved.

WOMEN, THEIR CAREERS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

To guarantee or ensure that work-life fit is maintained and preserved, parents are cautious about developing their career or even taking a simple promotion or new opportunity. It is clearly a balancing act where existing arrangements must be weighed carefully against a new job or opportunity. This is a greater consideration for mothers than fathers, and is likely to be an impediment to women's career development, entrenching traditional gender employment patterns of the male breadwinner model (figure 10). However, it is important to recognise that there are likely to be a number of factors at play here and it is not simply the risk of a new job disrupting childcare arrangements. Also important will be choice and preference.

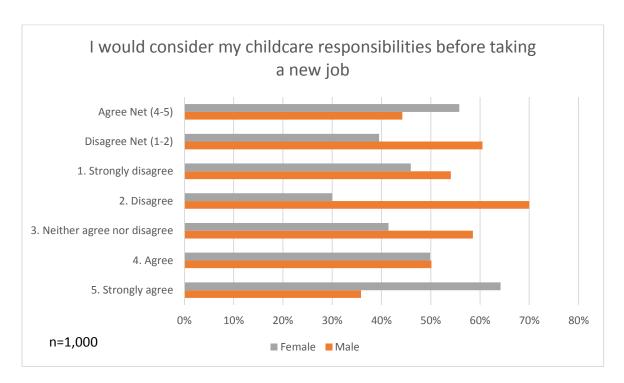


Figure 10

CHILDCARE - A SNAPSHOT

For the majority of parents surveyed in this year's *Index*, childcare is an integral component of their life and work mix. Grandparental care is the most common type of care, and many parents combined the types of childcare they used to get the right mix. Figures 11, 12 and 13 show the types of childcare that families use. It is worth noting the low number of workplace childcare arrangements. This is an opportunity that may be underdeveloped and its use and provision to parents may be under-estimated.²² Childcare is a crucial factor,

²² The Lasting Impact of Employer Sponsored Childcare, Bright Horizons, 2013

and choice about childcare will enable families to get the work and family balance they want as well as benefiting employers. Maximising options is essential, and employers have a role to play.

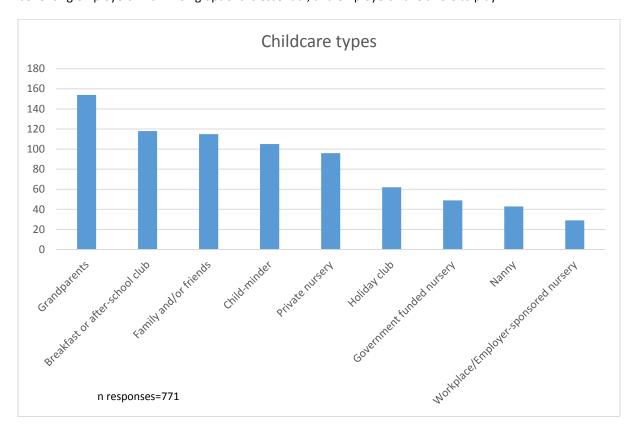


Figure 11

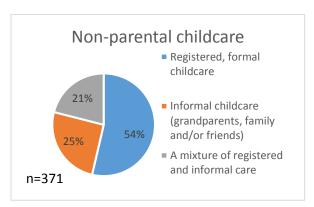


Figure 12

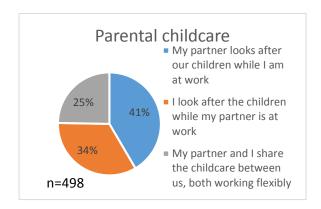


Figure 13

Thirty-seven per cent said that they used some external childcare and of these 54 per cent used registered formal childcare, 25 per cent used informal childcare (grandparents, friends etc.) and 21 per cent used a mixture of formal and informal. For those using formal childcare, the most common type they used was private nursery care, and the majority of parents used just under 20 hours per week, broadly in line with the national median of 21 hours a week.²³

Other parents said that they shared all the childcare between themselves and their partner (figure 14), or did not use childcare for reasons of affordability or availability. The proportion of shared caring is noteworthy, and the number of fathers saying that they share care is over 20 per cent. Younger parents (16-35) are most likely to report both working flexibly and sharing care. Although typical patterns are clearly visible (mothers doing the most childcare) there is a significant proportion of men who are now doing some childcare during the working week, particularly amongst younger families. This suggests that it is becoming more commonplace for parents to share care to some degree, and that fathers are more involved. This is a complex picture and one that is likely coloured by a variety of factors: financial; aspirational and social.

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²³ Childcare and early years survey of parents 2012-2013, Department for Education, 2014

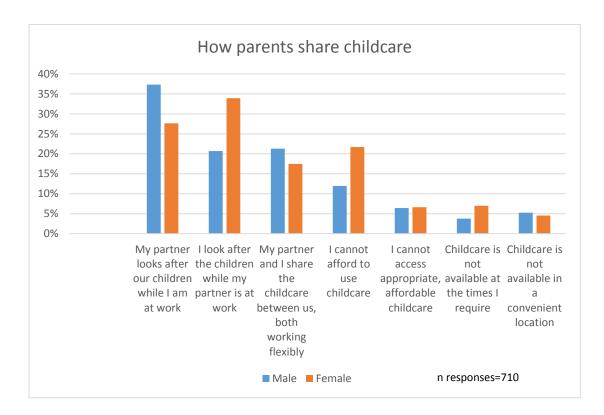


Figure 14

SHARING CARE

The way the parents combine work and care is shaped both by personal preference and external factors like the type of job they do and the sector in which they work, as well as established expectations in the workplace and beyond about who works and who cares. However, the *Index* shows that parental behaviour is adapting. For example, fathers are doing more activities such as dropping children at school in the morning (figure 15). When Working Families carried out research²⁴ amongst fathers at the school gate in 2004-05, the researchers found relatively few fathers dropping off children at school. However, this picture has changed markedly, with many more fathers now visible at the school gate in the morning, particularly younger fathers. This points to a picture of increased father involvement in everyday childcare that is also likely to be supporting mothers' work-life balance.

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²⁴ Daddy's Home, Working Families 2004

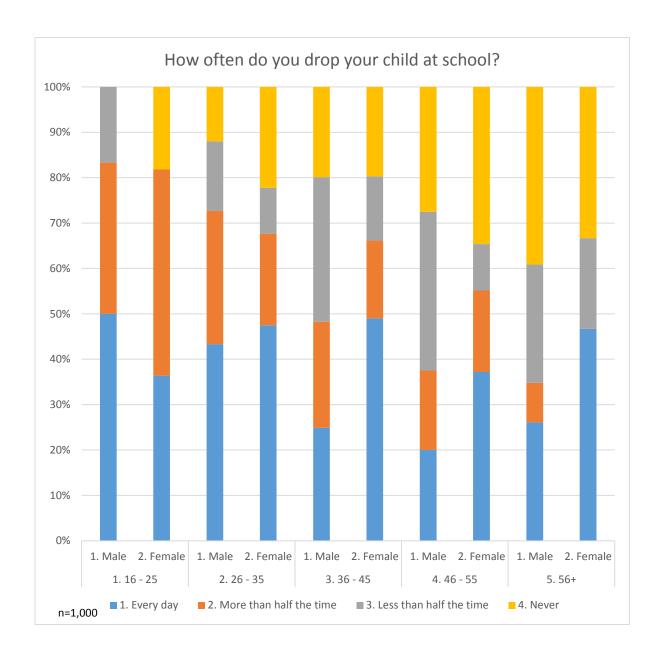


Figure 15

This does not mean that caring is equally shared though. Mothers, for example, are much more likely to be the ones picking up from school in the afternoon, and are seen as the main care providers by schools and childcare providers (figure 16), although men aged 26-35 report they are equally as likely to be called as mothers if there is a problem.

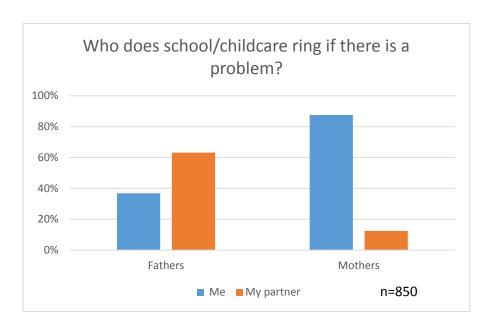


Figure 16

In the workplace parents report a similar mind-set - that it is expected that mothers will disrupt their working day rather than fathers. Both mothers and fathers say that it is easier for mothers to take time off for child or eldercare, suggesting that culture within many workplaces follows traditional lines about who works and cares (figure 17). When looked at by job income (as a proxy for seniority) it is the case that higher paid (and probably more senior) women agree that it is easier to take time off than lower paid (and probably more junior) men by a ratio of two to one. Seniority is not sufficient to eliminate gendered caring expectations, and while the extra control over working time that senior staff have may also allow for more unexpected caring needs to be met, senior men are the least likely to disrupt work for care. Caring responsibilities for other relatives are also primarily done by women²⁵ and the challenge in terms of career development or even simply sustaining paid work can be insurmountable.²⁶ Women face both the task of being both the main provider of childcare and of eldercare.

²⁵ Sandwich Caring, Carers UK and Employers for Carers, 2012

²⁶ Ibid

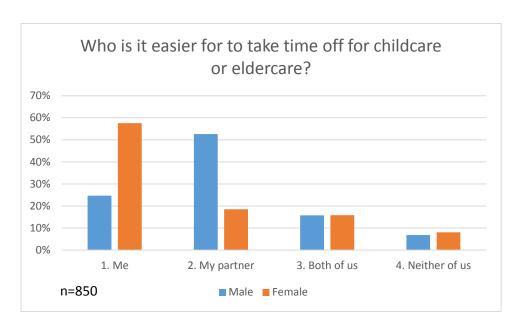


Figure 17

There are differences in the way that fathers and mothers see their family responsibilities. Other research²⁷ has found that although fathers may be doing more childcare than previous generations, the type of childcare that they are doing is not the same as that done by women. One description is that fathers do the 'fun' childcare such as playing with and entertaining children, whilst mothers fulfil the childcare tasks that are essential but viewed as less 'fun' (laundry, cleaning up etc.). Parents were asked about what they did after returning from work. There are clear differences in the way that mothers and fathers behave, as shown in figure 18.

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²⁷ Gatrell, C, Hard Labour: the sociology of parenthood, 2004

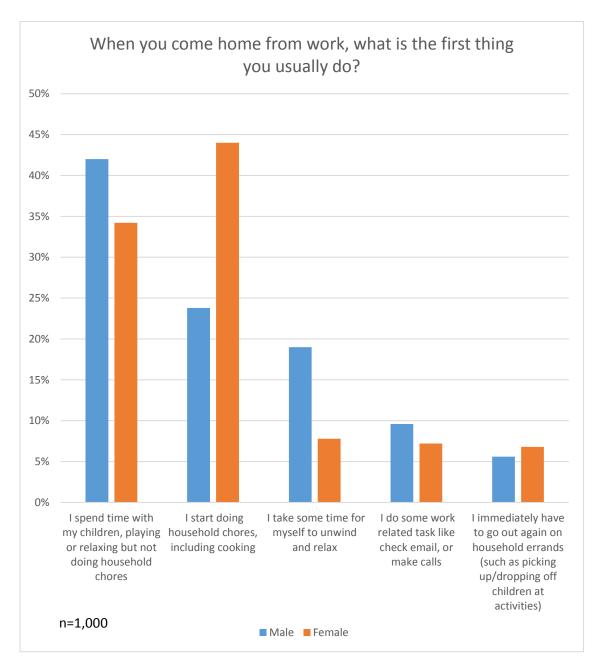


Figure 18

Mothers are more likely to immediately embark on domestic tasks and chores than fathers, who were more likely to spend time playing with their children. Fathers were also more likely to take some 'me' time to unwind and relax. It is probable that fathers can only do this because mothers are shouldering more of the domestic burden, working flexibly to facilitate family life. Of all parents, almost half of those (46 per cent) aged 26-35 said they prioritised playing with their children when they got in from work, the highest proportion of all age groups.

FREE CHILDCARE - THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Parents were asked about coming changes to the way that childcare is funded and the hours of free childcare available. Parents were asked if they were aware that employer supported childcare vouchers are being phased out to be replaced by a new tax-free childcare scheme. More than two fifths of those using formal paid-for childcare (43 per cent) said that they were not aware of the new scheme. Sixteen per cent of the parents used childcare vouchers via their employers, and of these parents, just under a third did not know that vouchers are being replaced. This suggests that for many parents there needs to be more communication about the change.

Parents were also asked about the increase from 15 to 30 hours per week of free childcare for three and four year olds in England and Wales, and whether this increase would affect their plans. Of those with children at the ages at which they might be eligible to utilise this free entitlement (i.e. three years old or younger), 72 per cent said they were aware (against an overall awareness of 61 per cent amongst all parents) of the increase in free hours. Amongst the parents of children of three years old and younger, the envisaged effect of the changes can be seen in figure 19.

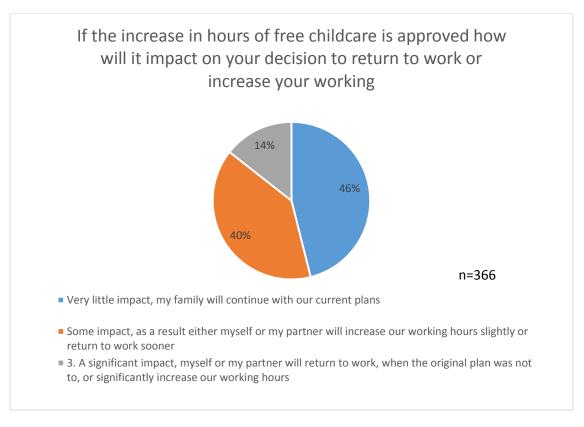


Figure 19

A significant minority reported that they intend to increase their working hours to some greater or lesser extent but almost half reported it will make no difference. This suggests that by the age of three and four, when the 30 hours entitlement starts, parents have already made their childcare arrangements and have negotiated working patterns to fit around these and are unwilling to disrupt them. It may also be the case that parents' working patterns (such as unsocial hours or shift work) mean that provision is not going to be available at times which fit with their work. However, only 12 per cent of parents using childcare said that availability was a problem currently so this is unlikely to be a dominant factor in parents' intentions. It is important to remember that we surveyed people for whom this will be new, and not part of their original

planning. For children born in a couple of years' time, it is likely parents will be planning for these hours. Employers will also need to plan and could offer practical solutions such as workplace nurseries, providing information about childcare options, back-up care services for when childcare plans break down as well as demonstrating cultural change in how the organisation views the balance between caring and work responsibilities.

FAMILY LIFE AND WORK - GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

It is clear that where parents are navigating the boundary between work and family life is where conflict is most keenly felt. Parents were asked to describe how work impinged on their family life, if at all, across a range of common everyday activities. The results can be seen in figure 20.

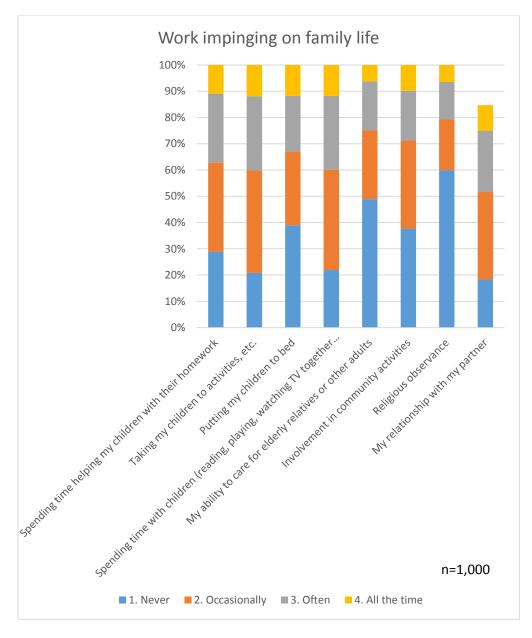


Figure 20

It is evident that there are significant levels of disruption to family life on a regular basis for many families. Although it is not unreasonable to expect work occasionally to impinge on family life, a substantial proportion of parents are saying that this happens often or all of the time. This year's *Index* found that 65 per cent of parents said that family life is their highest priority (compared to five per cent who cited work). Spending time with children is impinged upon often or all the time in 40 per cent of families, and it is at a similar level for other child-related activities including helping with homework, and taking children to activities. The relationship with a partner is also impinged upon often or all the time for a third of parents.

It is important to recognise that the consistent erosion of 'family' time by work is likely to have negative consequences. Not only are family activities in themselves disrupted, with the attendant pressures and tensions that this might cause, but essential 'non-work' time is disrupted. Employees require this time to reenergise and to rest. If work consistently intrudes upon this time employees will eventually come to resent this, and will also lack the essential downtime that they need to remain effective and energised at work.

The effects of family and work imbalance can be seen both in the things parents do as a result, and in their attitudes towards work in general and towards their employer. Parents reported (46 per cent) that their working life was becoming increasingly stressful, and more than a third (35 per cent) felt that work negatively dominated their family life. Where balance is elusive, and work increasingly encroaches into family life, the effects on both family and working life may enter into a negative pattern. The quality of home life and of work life are inter-related²⁸ and poor family balance may feed back into the workplace in the form of lowered engagement and performance. Although an understandable response to tough economic times for organisations might be to ask more of employees, there is a point beyond which the gains from extra hours and increased individual workloads diminish. Performance tails off²⁹ and resentment builds, particularly amongst those employees who feel unable to match their family and work aspirations to the reality of their working lives (figure 21).

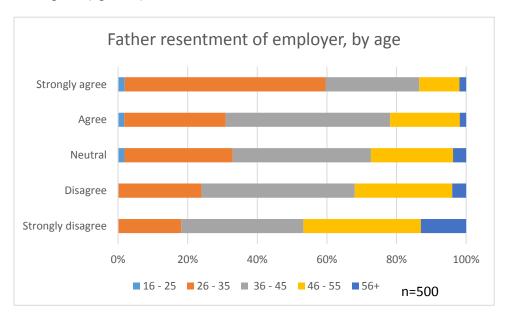


Figure 21

²⁸ Happy Homes, Productive Workplaces, One Plus One and Working Families, 2011

²⁹ Working long hours, a review of the evidence. Institute of Employment Studies, 2003

Younger fathers (millennials) are more resentful about their opportunities for work-life balance than older fathers, although they have slightly higher levels of uptake of flexible working. However, their aspirations and expectations may be different³⁰ and they are not finding it easy to achieve the right work-life fit within existing organisational cultures even with their use of flexible working. Younger fathers are, for example, those most likely to say they would like to downshift into a less stressful job and would take a pay cut to work less. The same levels of resentment are not seen for mothers when looked at by age, probably for a combination of reason - mothers generally have higher levels of flexible working, particularly reduced hours work; workplace culture is more accepting of women's flexible working; and organisational work-life policy has, historically, focused on mothers and fathers are still catching up.³¹

Home life is also affected by the encroachment of work into family life in the choices that parents are able to make around their general health and wellbeing. This is both at 'everyday' levels and activities like exercise and diet, and significantly impacts where parents report being 'burned out' by work. In terms of everyday healthy living, parents report that time constraints caused by work result in some unhealthy behaviours (figure 22).

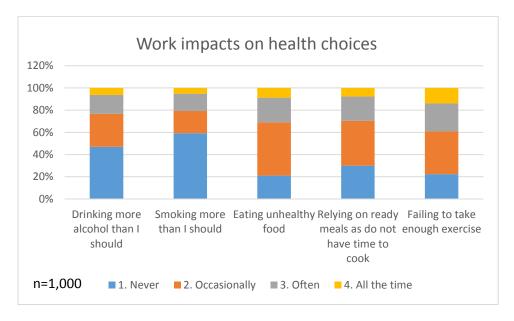


Figure 22

Diet and exercise are the most often affected areas, with 39 per cent of parents saying they don't exercise frequently enough, and 31 per cent eating unhealthily. This is important as wellbeing and health are vital. If excessive work time is compromising the ability of parents to make healthy choices then there are clearly serious implications not just for individuals and their families, but also for public policy makers. Individual health is increasingly seen as a key national issue, and governments strive to encourage behaviours that will create a healthy population.

Many employers already understand the importance of wellbeing, and support it in the workplace through employer sponsored dependent care, for example: however, it is essential that wellbeing is supported outside of the workplace too, through support of good working practices from policy makers. Parents appreciate in

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³⁰ PWC Ibid

³¹ Top Employers for Working Families, Benchmark 2014/5, Working Families

particular employer-provided childcare: research has found that three quarters of parents who use it say that a workplace nursery is the key benefit that their employer offers, and more than half say it is a reason to stay with their employer rather than move jobs.³² Employers should take notice and, where possible, consider offering some kind of childcare.

Parents were asked to think about the idea of burnout, to ascertain how acutely parents were feeling the pressure of combining family and work. They were asked to think about burnout as a state of mental exhaustion caused by stress related to work, family responsibilities, or other aspects of their lives. The results can be seen in figure 23, below.

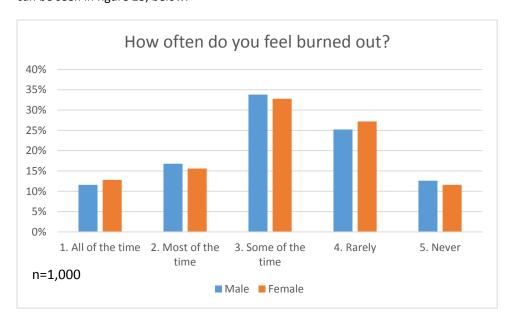


Figure 23

Twenty nine per cent of fathers and mothers reported being burned out most or all the time. This is a significant level of parents who are in a state of mental exhaustion regularly. Millennials, or younger parents (16-35) were almost twice as likely to report feeling burned out as older parents: 42 per cent of millennial parents said they feel burned out most or all of the time, compared with only 22 per cent of 36-45 year olds and 17 per cent of those over 45. Whilst work has intensified for many people (43 per cent of parents said their work life was increasingly stressful, and 28 per cent said they are more stressed by work now than three years ago), it is not sustainable to accept these levels of burnout.

Parents were clear about where burnout originated from in their family and work mix, with three quarters identifying work as the element in the mix that would have to change to reduce their feeling of burnout. Parents who said they had a caring responsibility for another adult (an elderly relative or relative with a disability over 18) were also more likely to report feeling burned out. To deal with burnout parents said they would take different measures, shown in figure 24.

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³² Bright Horizons, Ibid

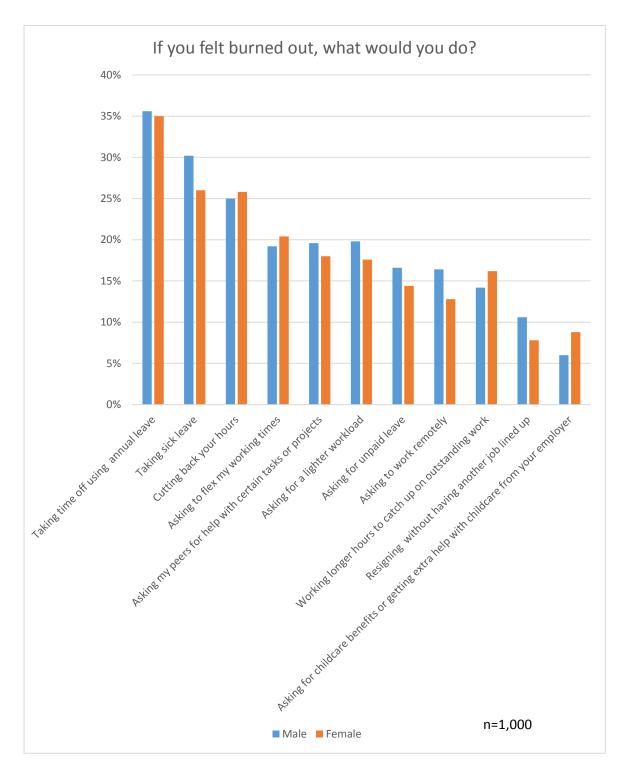


Figure 24

The primary response is to take themselves away from the workplace, either through annual leave or taking sick leave. This presents problems for both parents and their employers: annual leave used to recover health and mental wellbeing is probably leave that cannot be replaced for use at other times of the year, or for family activities. Burnout is unlikely to neatly dovetail with school holidays or childhood illnesses, where parents report they are often 'spending' their annual leave entitlement. Using leave to cover burnout will leave parents short over the rest of the year.

Taking time off sick is also problematic: parents may not be able to afford sick leave, or there may be other negative consequences of taking time off regularly if you are burned out 'often' or 'all the time'. Workplaces will also suffer, with unplanned sickness absence disrupting work and placing additional burdens on other workers.

The next most popular responses were to ask about cutting back working time and asking to work flexibly. This is a positive, proactive approach that will lead to more sustainable resolution of burnout problems than the emergency fix of taking sickness or annual leave, but it relies upon employers having the policies and, very importantly, the right culture in place for this to happen. As figure 7 shows, unsustainable workload is a primary driver of extra hours. However, many employees feel constrained by their organisation's culture about asking for limits on their working time and changes to their working pattern. For example, only 53 per cent of fathers said that they would feel confident asking their employer about reducing their hours, working remotely or placing boundaries on responding to calls or emails (figure 25).

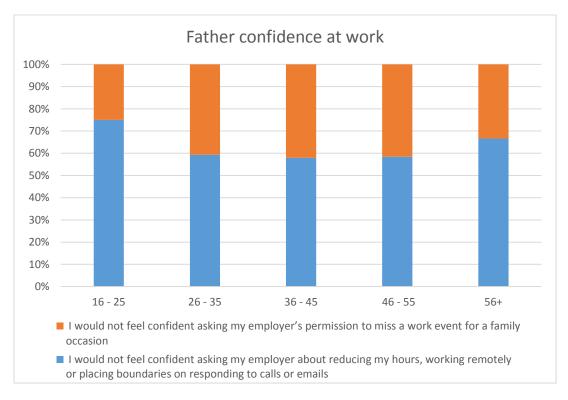


Figure 25

With work-life balance policies now well established in many companies, and the Right to Request flexible working available to all employees, the role of company culture is thrown into sharp relief: for many employees, particularly fathers, culture is the main barrier to more flexibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall picture is of many families that are only just managing. A significant number of parents are clearly finding it difficult to achieve and maintain the right work-life fit. Factors like the need for two incomes in couple households mean that time is under increased pressure, and for single parents in particular these pressures are significant. Combining family life, childcare and work in a way that doesn't leave parents feeling burned out is clearly very difficult to achieve. There are areas where both employers and the government can

make changes that would make getting this balance easier for families, the effects of which would not be confined to families: employers, the economy and wider society would also benefit.

RECOMMENDATION 1: FLEXIBILITY BY DEFAULT

As noted, flexible working policy is widespread, with most organisations offering some kind of flexible working practices, and all employees are entitled to the Right to Request Flexible Working. However, as the *Index* shows, many employees are still not working flexibly, and there is hesitancy amongst fathers in particular about flexible working, especially reduced hours working. There is a clear role for employers here, in ensuring that flexible working is available to all employees, not just high value or senior ones. As we have seen, many parents reported that flexible working was not available in their job. Evidence from Working Families Top Employers Awards shows that there are in fact very few roles that can't accommodate some kind of flexible working, and employers must be certain that where flexibility is not allowed this is for genuine operational reasons and not because managers are not comfortable or have no experience of flexibility within their teams. A default position that puts flexible working off limits for employees may placate line manager anxieties (as we have seen, respondents have reported that their line manager isn't supportive or sympathetic to their desire to work flexibly) or maintain prevailing culture and practice, but in the long term it will almost certainly be counterproductive. Organisations may fall behind others in their sector who have moved towards a flexible working culture, and opportunities for employee engagement, motivation and retention may be missed.

One practical measure that employers should take is to ensure that flexibility is built into the recruitment process. They can do this using the Happy to Talk Flexible Working ³³ strapline, which is designed to encourage employers to signal their openness to flexible working from the outset, and attract a wider range of candidates. It is also a way for employers to think about the way that existing jobs are done and how they are designed to see if there is the possibility to incorporate some flexible working into them. As a starting point a **flexible by default** approach to job design and recruitment should be adopted, so that all jobs are advertised on a flexible basis unless there is a specific, good business reason not to. Ministers should act and recruit business leaders as 'flexible working' champions, and should encourage private sector employers to adopt Working Families' *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline. Additional training and communication about the strategic value of flexible working in terms of opportunities for employee engagement, motivation and retention is vital.

RECOMMENDATION 2: GETTING WORKPLACE CULTURE RIGHT

Parents (particularly millennials) expect to be able to have a good work and family balance, but where this balance is elusive there are negative effects. In the workplace resentment against employers becomes evident, with likely attendant consequences such as decreased motivation and performance. Additionally, where work overloads parents, ill health and sickness absence increase, with parents adopting unhealthy behaviours, feeling stressed and facing burnout. Helping parents achieve the right work-life balance is therefore essential and makes good business sense. Flexible working will help parents towards the balance that they want, but on its own it is not able to resolve the problems of work intensification and overload. Employers need to make sure that they are able to meet the demand for work that fits with an outside family life, and that the way that work is designed and organised supports this. As well as being realistic about what can be achieved in the hours allocated to the role, this means developing a culture where employees are not hesitant about discussing workloads, and that all employees at every level and across sectors and salary bands are able to

³³ Happy to Talk strapline and guidance can be found at www.workingfamilies.org.uk

exercise some control over their own workloads. Again, training and communication about the importance of job design and fit as well as the strategic value of flexible working in terms of opportunities for employee engagement, motivation and retention, is vital.

In terms of what we have observed about women, their careers and their work-life balance, the importance of recognising choice and preference in terms of employment practice, is essential for organisations. A 'Lifecycles' approach, that recognises that there will be fluctuating periods in a woman's working life where work and care responsibilities shift in priority, ensures that the pace of progression can slow or accelerate but not be permanently derailed.

RECOMMENDATION 3: JOINED UP THINKING ABOUT FAMILY AND WORK

The quality of working life is of increasing importance to individuals. Millennials frequently cite the opportunity for a good work-life balance as a key consideration in choosing a new job, and the *Index* clearly shows an appetite from younger parents to be fully involved in family life. There is evidence in the *Index*, for example, of the small but growing proportion of parents who share childcare and work; that new patterns of family life are arising and the old 1.5 model is becoming less common. But barriers remain for parents who might want to do things differently: the gender pay gap still works against more equal division of care and work; workplace and social expectations still exist around mothers being the main or sole carer; flexible working remains gendered, especially reduced hours work; and childcare provision is not always available or affordable. The recession and subsequent austerity has hit family incomes³⁴ and parents may feel that their working choices are constrained as a result. Policy makers need to consider families as a whole when introducing policy, and think about how families might be best supported.

When formulating policy that affects parents as both employees and as carers, local and central government should determine the impact on the ability of families to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance through the use of the Family Test.³⁵

- What kind of impact might the policy have on family formation?
- What kind of impact will the policy have on families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities or the onset of a long-term health condition?
- What impacts will the policy have on all family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities?
- How does the policy impact families before, during and after couple separation?
- How does the policy impact those families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown?

³⁴ Commission on Living Standards, Resolution Foundation, 2013

³⁵ The Family Test aims to support families. The Department for Work and Pensions says: 'The test includes a series of questions that all civil servants will need to consider when first developing policy and legislation and before it is put to ministers or introduced to Parliament. This will ensure that family perspective is at the heart of government policy.' The five Family Test questions are:

RECOMMENDATION 4: BRIDGE THE CHILDCARE GAP

The point when parents settle on what arrangements they make is often around the time mothers return to work after maternity leave. Policy makers might consider and cost the introduction of a free childcare hours allowance for children aged under two - when plans are being made and families are working out their work and care arrangements - as a way of bridging the gap between the end of maternity and parental leave in the first year of life and children starting school. This could be combined with additional paid parental leave. The benefits to families would be felt in terms of more choices about combining work and care, and to employers and the economy by enabling more parents, especially women, to return to work if they want to and to fully utilise their skills and experience.

Enabling more fathers to equally share care is important too: fathers are still, by and large, limited in their involvement through a combination of workplace culture and gendered caring models. Although Shared Parental Leave (SPL) is a welcome start in encouraging more fathers to do more significant amounts of childcare, more is required and a period of fathers-only leave, paid at salary replacement rates, should be the next step. Research from Working Families³⁶ has found that initial take up of SPL has been slow although expected by most employers to increase. Many employers reported a positive response from their male employees about the possibility of taking longer periods away from work for childcare, and this chimes with the increased appetite for family involvement seen in this year's *Index*. However, barriers around culture and acceptability persist and the research also found that there was resistance from some mothers towards greater sharing of leave as they were unwilling to 'give up' maternity leave to enable their partner to take SPL.

The phasing out of childcare vouchers leaves a space for employers to continue being involved in childcare for their employees. This might be the creation of childcare spaces and workplace nursery provision, or working with local providers to match up employee demand for childcare with local supply. What parents want is good quality, affordable childcare. Policy makers need to join with employers and providers to work on a childcare strategy that can deliver this, and deliver a mix of childcare that works for, and is available to, all parents that want it.

RECOMMENDATION 5: WORK WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

A picture is emerging around younger parents (millennials), who seem to have different expectations of how work and family can and should be combined. This is probably best seen not as an abrupt generational change, but a natural consequence of the rise of work-life balance over the last two decades to become more mainstream working practice, coupled with changing societal expectations of family and parenting. One area this can be observed in the *Index* is around millennial fathers. Of all fathers, they are the ones who are most likely to use flexible working. This is an important finding. Although fathers are yet to take up reduced hours work (like part-time and job share) in anything like the same numbers as mothers, nonetheless the numbers of young fathers working flexibly is significant and shows that in the workplace some kinds of flexibility are commonplace practice now, and younger fathers and employers of fathers have accepted flexibility as business as usual.

However, millennial fathers are also the group that is least comfortable asking for boundaries around work, and the most resentful towards their employers, with 42 per cent feeling resentful towards their employers about their opportunities for work-life balance. Their expectations for a good work-life balance are not being met, despite access to flexible working. Workplace cultures are not aligned with these expectations, and

³⁶ Shared Parental Leave: the perspective from employers, Working Families 2016

although flexibility is available, this is against a background of working extra hours on a regular basis, workplace cultures that equate long hours with commitment and workloads that are unsustainable. Millennials in general report that they are the most likely to feel burned out: they are also the most likely to say they would like to downshift and the most willing to take a pay cut to find a better balance. The idea of career progression characterised by long hours and sacrifice of family life is less prominent in their mind-set.

It is important to recognise this difference in attitude. From an employer perspective it poses questions about engagement and loyalty: how will work have to be configured to meet the expectations of millennials? The pace of workplace culture change can be slow; relying on it to meet changing expectations may not be sufficient, without concerted effort to really drive the uptake and acceptability of flexible working. Employers who are unable to meet the challenge of changing expectations will find themselves struggling to attract the kind of employees that they want, and of retaining them. This cohort of employees will be the senior managers and leaders of the future, and will change the culture as they progress through their organisations and so it makes sense to ensure that this process is smoothed by putting in place the policy framework to support this change.

An additional challenge, not just for employers but for policy makers too, is the one about flexibility for all: this applies to millennials as much as it does to other workers and negative effects may even be exacerbated if flexibility in lower income roles is constrained. Policy makers must address the question: how can compatible flexibility be supported, and how can barriers to equal share of care be addressed and removed? How, effectively, can policy be designed to work *with* the grain of the work-life fit aspirations and needs of young families?



About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life balance campaign organisation. We support and give a voice to working parents and carers, whilst also helping employers create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone. Our name defines two of the most important parts of life: family and employment. These are often in conflict. We feel passionately that this is unnecessary, counter-productive and must change. Things ARE changing. By working with parents and carers and organisations alike, Working Families helps children, working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work. By operating in the real world of pragmatic advice and practical solutions, we are making our vision a reality.

To find out more about us visit: www.workingfamilies.org.uk



About Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Bright Horizons Family Solutions is a leading UK provider of high-quality child care, early years education and other services designed to help employers and families better address the challenges of integrating work and family life. Bright Horizons provides nursery care both to consumers and in partnership with employers and also offers innovative round-the-clock back-up care packages for children and adults. With a reputation for excellence spanning three decades, Bright Horizons has more than 200 nurseries in the UK and Ireland. From the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008 Bright Horizons has consistently outperformed its sector in terms of "Outstanding" awards made by Ofsted. Bright Horizons is one of the UK's Best Workplaces as well as one of the Top 25 Best Large Workplaces in Europe as designated by the Great Place to Work Institute.

To find out more about us visit: www.brighthorizons.co.uk

Working Families Cambridge House 1 Addington Square LondonSE5 OHF

Tel: 020 7253 7243 (main)

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk Email: office@workingfamilies.org.uk

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